

Learning to sustain social action

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Chapter 12 (Check)

Learning to sustain social action

Jenny Phillimore and Angus McCabe

Chapter Aims

This chapter aims to explore:

- how people learn for, and through, community activism
- the role of social networks in community learning
- hanging learning needs in evolving community groups and how those needs are met.

Context; from social capital to capacity building

Over the past decades, the concept of social capital (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000) has been influential in the development of policy around communities and neighbourhoods. More recently, research into social networks and how these operate at local level, has also become important in terms of informing approaches to neighbourhood change, behavioural ‘nudge’ and community resilience (Edwards, 2009; Rowson et al., 2010; Cabinet Office, 2011). Whilst funding was provided to support capacity building in BTR organisations the notion of building capacity within organisations has somewhat fallen from grace and been replaced by ‘developing skills and confidence’ (IVAR, 2010) or ‘capabilities’ (BIG Lottery Fund, 2011).

Under New Labour administrations, there was significant investment into a range of capacity building and community engagement initiatives: from ChangeUp, Capacity Builders, Community Empowerment Networks and Take Part followed by the Coalition’s Community Organisers Programme and Big Local post the 2010 election. These initiatives coincided with a growing trend towards often rather mechanistic needs analysis toolkits (NCVO, undated), ‘Kite Marks’ and quality standards, such as Community Matters’ ‘Visible Communities’, Birmingham Voluntary Service Council’s Quality First, and the Charities Evaluation Service’s PQASSO Quality Standard. As a result, learning as a political process (Mayo and Thompson, 1995) has, in the voluntary sector, been overtaken by concepts of competencies and vocationalism (Foley, 1999).

A series of reports have highlighted some of the difficulties of, and tensions within, these initiatives. For example, programmes lacked base-lines against which to measure ‘built capacity’ (NAO, 2009; TSRC, 2009). The focus of evaluations has tended to be the perceived quality of delivery (of training, advice etc.) rather than impact and outcomes in the longer term (Sender et al., 2011; Take Part Network, 2011). Where good practice and related guidance has been produced, it has tended to define community organisations as smaller, formal, voluntary groups with paid staff (Kail, Keen and Lumley, 2011) or multi-purpose community anchors (IVAR, 2011) with incomes of up to £1 million per year and a (hierarchical) management structure. Community groups and activities that are ‘below the radar’, that is with very small incomes, no/few formal structures and dependent on volunteers, have largely been omitted from consideration.

Further, with cuts to sector infrastructure nationally and locally, ‘physical’ training events have been increasingly replaced by on-line learning materials. This disadvantages rural groups with poor access

to super-fast broadband and assumes high levels of computer literacy – which is not always the case. (Fishbourne and Derounian, 2009, Harris and McCabe 2016)

Further, research into social networks and social capital, their value and use (i.e. Putnam, 2000), has tended not to explore their complex relationship and interaction with the uneven distribution of other forms of capital such as human, economic and cultural (Bourdieu, 1986; Savage et al., 2005), or widespread access to social technologies.

As a result, little is known about skill and resource acquisition processes in small below the radar community groups and activities which are generally dependent on voluntary labour, (McCabe et al, 2009). This chapter aims to examine the role of social networks within ‘below the radar’ community groups, identify how they shape the emergence and ongoing evolution of community action and the ways in which social networks facilitate access to skills, knowledge and resources.

Looking at learning in community action: Research aims and methods

The starting point for the research was a Third Sector Research Centre review of the literature on social network theories and research methods for mapping networks (Burnage, 2010). Four main approaches to mapping social networks were identified: *Whole-network Design* (Wesserman and Faust, 1994), *Egocentric Design* (Marsden, 2006), *Cognitive Social Structure (CSS) Design* (Krackhardt, 1987) and *Retrospective Design* – e.g. the Life History Calendar (LHC) (Axinn, 1999).

Whilst useful in thinking, at a theoretical level, around social networks and community action, each framework had its limitations. In particular, none of these approaches had the potential to illustrate ‘how resources within a network (including people, skills, knowledge, finance etc.) alter over time’ each presenting a snapshot of networks at a particular point in time or providing a temporal perspective for a single individual or group (Burnage, 2010: 5).

Stage two of the research therefore involved developing interview schedules which enabled participants to reflect on how their group had changed over time and to:

- identify the social networks involved in establishing/delivering the group’s actions;
- outline the knowledge, skills and resources they used and their source;
- consider gaps in skills, resources and knowledge and the impacts of their absence.

Respondents were encouraged to reflect, in a narrative fashion, over the lifecycle of their group and covered a wide range of issues such as how and why they came together, how and what they had learned over time, the relative importance of different types of skills and knowledge and how skills and knowledge were shared within the group and with others.

Interviews were conducted at 11 venues (including community hubs) with 16 representatives from small, volunteer based, community organisations. These were supplemented by three focus groups exploring the use of skills, knowledge and resources in small community groups involving 45 activists, practitioners and academics.

The sample was selected, drawing on a range of community networks, to reflect the diversity of below the radar activity so covered different geographical settings (rural/urban, inner city/peripheral estates) and communities of interest. It also focused on groups that had sustained

themselves over a number of years. The characteristics of the groups participating is summarised in Table 1.

Despite this diversity of location, focus and activity, each of the groups in the pilot study shared certain common characteristics. All the groups involved started ‘below the radar’ as unincorporated associations, but had moved over time to gaining some kind of legal status. All had been successful and were highly visible within (though not necessarily outside) their own communities and had achieved their original objectives. All had a core group of six to eight activists but were able to draw on a much wider pool of volunteers. Their core group of activists tended to be stable over time despite some changes in social networks. Crucially, none had ‘failed’ and there was no evidence of the intra-group conflict that has been found to characterise some community based organisations (Taylor et al., 2006). The sample therefore consisted of community organisations which might be defined as successful. Clearly exploring unsuccessful organisations would have brought a different perspective but the approach adopted enabled lessons to be learned about the factors which facilitate the growth and survival of community action.

Table 1: Groups participating in the research (anonmised)

Name	Location	Primary purpose	Activities
Brownnton Village Hall Development Group	Rural	Community Hub/meeting space	Provides space for a diverse range of local groups and activities Fundraising Social events
Canute Flood Action Group	Rural	Campaigning	Lobbying for flood defences Fundraising Social events
Central Africa Communities Association (CACA)	Community of interest/ identity	Representation/ cultural identity	Social events Representation (immigration and nationality) Social history
Cobalt Connects	Market town	Area improvements	Asset management Social events/fundraising Informal learning opportunities Promoting the local economy/green initiatives

Faith in Volunteers England (FIVE)	Community of interest/ identity (faith groups)	Volunteer networking	Volunteer support Development of volunteer opportunities in faith based organisations
Hadrian's Wall Tenants and Residents Association (HWTRA)	Peripheral estate	Advocacy and representation	Representing tenants Estate Management Social events Community clean-ups
Heritage Hall	Peripheral estate	Community Centre/hub	Preservation society Local history group Friends of the park Coffee shop/snack bar Community festival
Hopes 4 All	Peripheral estate	Multi-purpose faith based organisation	Pre-school group Youth work Dance group Faith activities (Bible class etc.)
Noham Village Shop	Rural	Service provider: community shop	Volunteers running local community shop Fundraising Social events
Oddington Hall	Peripheral Estate	Community centre/hub	Neighbourhood regeneration Room hire Social events Community development
Stop It Now	Women's group/peripheral estate	Community responses to domestic violence	Support groups Advice and counselling

The learning journey

The skills, knowledge and resources developed within, and needed by, each group changed over time. Having started with generic inter-personal skills largely underpinned by shared motivations and a degree of enthusiasm, most acquired highly technical skills: ranging from shop or asset management through to research (CFAG) and a detailed knowledge of housing legislation (HWTRA) or safeguarding issues (Hope 4 All). Possessing such expertise, however, were not seen as necessary at the early stages of group establishment.

Starting out

When starting out, respondents identified a set of common features that had enabled the group to move from informality to some form of more structured activity. A common cause that brought people together was, in each case, the catalyst. Sometimes this was a crisis such as problems with flooding, or the loss of local facilities, other times it was a desire to overcome isolation or to provide some social activities for an overlooked group.

‘I think it’s important to have a common cause. If people don’t have a common cause they won’t come together. I think it helped that it was a short campaign not one that became long and drawn out. That helped keep energy levels high. Also we were focused. ... We worked on what we could change and not on things that you cannot do.’ (Canute Flood Action Group)

Not all groups began with a clear idea of what they wanted to achieve. For example CACA started out as a social group, meeting to play football. As refugee numbers rose in the late 1990s and early 2000s the group evolved to focus on providing immigration and nationality advice to new arrivals because they found that members of their community were struggling to get the support they needed from mainstream agencies. The Tenants and Residents Group were motivated by a poor housing repair service and the disruption associated with two substantial capital projects on land immediately adjoining their estate: “It is people, and quite rightly, who are concerned about where they’re living” (HWTRA).

HWTRA and the domestic violence group (Stop It Now) were motivated by anger. This emotion and having a ‘common enemy’ was a key driver, in the early stages of their organising:

‘It happened because of something that happened to a friend of mine and I was angry and cross about it, and that’s really... you know, that was the thing, it’s the passion, I suppose, and that’s what we’re probably trying to get through to people, what is your passion, what is the thing that will drive you forward.’ (Stop it Now)

Cobham Connects’ starting point, however, was different: the local environment was seen as excellent and need to be preserved and developed:

‘But we are coming at it from the point of the aesthetics. “Wouldn’t it be lovely to have a green road?” We’re not coming at it from the “Oh God, we all hate...” It’s just a different way of going into the issues.’ (Cobham Connects)

Similarly, Heritage Hall’s activity was emerged from the “love of the area and the love of the building”.

Some kind of common cause, coupled with interpersonal skills, was critical to initial group development. Personality characteristics of group leaders or members were frequently identified as a further important resource for groups. Leaders were frequently charismatic: full of ideas, enthusiasm and determination. Their ability to attract other activists was seen as key:

‘There’s also issues as a leader, I think, in small groups that can be very good, but can also be counter-productive. It’s having the skills to be a leader, but accept the fact that there are people below you that can bring something to the party and not feel threatened by it... The controlling leader who won’t let others use their skills is dangerous.’ (Oddington Hall)

When asked what members of social networks brought to the group, determination and perseverance were frequently identified as key assets: “failure was not an option... we refused to be victims” (CFAG). A further asset was the possession of strong networks between key individuals and the wider community. Often those involved in establishing groups were very well networked and able to mobilise others to work towards delivering the groups aims and objectives. Just having these kinds of people in a group enabled them to access a major resource: human capital.

‘I know a lot of people and that helps, because I’ve been in the village a number of years, and I’ve involved myself in other projects in the past, not necessarily projects but just events and happenings in the village.’ (Noham Village Shop)

Campaigning, especially when rapid action was needed, would have been much more difficult without the relationships and networks, which were already in place. CFAG, Browntown Village Hall and Heritage Hall, used their extensive networks to identify others, often with specialist knowledge or professional skills, to address particular barriers or needs. For example as their projects progressed they actively sought local residents with business planning skills. While interviewees stressed the importance of personal characteristics and social networks they also identified elements of chance and ‘luck’ in both coming together initially and developing as a group:

‘It was just a fluke phone call to me because I don’t come to church or anything but he [the vicar] phoned me for somebody’s phone number, because he’d known my husband, and he mentioned that this was going to be on the programme and he was looking for volunteers. So I rang round some friends and we all came to the meeting’ (Heritage Hall)

Moving on: Drawing on skills, knowledge and resources

In terms of moving on from initial group formation, interviewees highlighted an important mix of ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ skills. The specific technical skills required evolved over time and included financial management, buildings management, health and safety, food hygiene, marketing and communications and many more competences depending on the nature of activities and actions. Interviewees were adamant that possession of such skills alone was not enough to ensure success of their groups. Certain types of interpersonal skills which facilitated team working were critical to ensuring that heterogeneous groups of people could work together effectively. The ability to negotiate and inspire confidence were also important.

‘The confidence of the people... The belief in themselves, and far more importantly, because some people have come on there and thought, “Am I capable of doing it?” “Well, yes you are. Four or five years later, look at you. Look at what you know.”’ (HWTRA)

Furthermore recognising and celebrating success and acknowledging contributions was seen as important. CFAG, for example, regularly contacted everyone who supported the campaign (from very active members to those who had signed petitions/organised fundraising events) to thank them. For HWRTA, celebrating successes and organising social events helped 'keep the energy going'.

Generally, these skills, certainly in the early stages of development, were not seen as community or voluntary sector specific. Indeed, none of the community activists interviewed had a background in the formal voluntary sector. Rather, they talked about transferrable skills, brought from their work place, their life experience, or from Trade Union activity. "Here I use what I have learned through my work. But this is more fun than work." (Heritage Hall)

Those involved in the Community Shop, Cobham Connects and Village Hall talked about being able to draw on the professional skills of active members: for example, an IT specialist designed their community website and a self-employed business woman managed their finances.

Developing skills, knowledge and resources

As groups evolved and moved towards achieving their goals, they identified a range of learning needs. These changed over time.

'People started with nothing when they arrived. Slept in each other's flats and on each other's floors. After the football there was a lot of talk like how do I renew my visa, how do I deal with this immigration problem? Now it has moved on. What we have identified is the barriers to employment and education,. So we have been doing something about that, getting an education '(CACA).

'I suppose the skills we needed did change a bit over time. So there was the data collection and putting the report together for the Environment Agency. After that it was more about lobbying and getting our case heard, involving the media, talking to the Council and officers and that was new to me and a really steep learning curve.' (CFAG)

As those involved in the Community Shop and Village Hall groups began to realise their goals, skills in fundraising coupled with enthusiasm and motivation which had enabled initial progress needed to be augmented with other skills; they had to learn how to manage an asset. HWTRA, moved from campaigning and negotiating to technical estate management skills. These skills were developed, however, not through formal training, but by 'seeing and doing' often by linking up with members of the community who had the requisite skills or by learning from similar groups in other locations. The village shop visited other community owned shops regionally and noted the importance of "adapting what seemed to work. Taking the best bits from each."

CACA 'learned the ropes' through observing the practices at a well-established voluntary organisation which temporarily offered them office and meeting space. The design of Brownnton Village Hall evolved from visiting other village halls "looking at spaces that worked and those that didn't and discovering what attracted people (to a Village Hall) and could make it viable".

Some groups identified very specific learning, again through seeing, doing and networking:

'But within that group it's about people who may be running their own businesses, sharing skills and experiences, but it's just... someone might say, "Oh I've got a problem with this on my computer," and someone else can say, "Oh I can sort that out". Or someone else might say, "Where can I...? I really need to find a new..." something and someone else says, "Well I know the person you need to speak to".' (Cobham Connects)

HWTRA found out about Tenant Management Organisations (TMOs) by chance through an internet search. However they only decided to change their status after meetings with several TMOs and through exploring other estate management options through site visits.

Addressing skills gaps

Surveys repeatedly highlight fundraising skills as one of the key problems in the voluntary sector (Brown et al., 2011, BVSC 2014) alongside governance issues (IVAR, 2010). Most, however, focus on larger organisations with paid staff. Interestingly, none of our respondents highlighted fundraising or governance as key learning needs at any stage in their development. Funding did, as the groups evolved, become a more important issue, enabling them to do more or, in terms of capital projects, achieve their goals. However, fundraising skills were also developed by 'trial and error' (Brownton Village Hall), by learning whilst doing, or through identifying someone in the social network with appropriate skills, rather than attending courses.

Networks were critical in identifying expertise and addressing skills gaps. This applied both within the community '*knowing who was around and who could do what*' but also when external support was required. For example, whilst respondents were well networked within their area/community of interest, as they evolved and took on greater levels of responsibility, vertical as well as horizontal relationships became more important: relationships that were often absent at the outset. In terms of using those networks the focus tended to be upon the person helping them, rather than their employing organisation. Relationships were 'individualised'. HWTRA, for example, experienced the local Housing Department as a barrier "but Jim and Ray have been really helpful". CFAG developed links with District and County Councillors, but again referred to them in first name terms rather than their official role. The groups in Noham and Brownton developed links with national village hall and community shop network organisations, but again talked about individuals rather than organisations per se. This disassociation from organisations reflects earlier studies which indicate that community groups are 'embedded more in networks of individual agency than institutional strategy' (Edwards and Woods 2006: 61).

Sharing skills, knowledge and resources

There was limited evidence of extensive skills sharing within each group; "people focus on what their speciality is, if they have one" (Noham Village Shop). Activists worked to existing skills sets and at a level they were comfortable with. However, groups were keen to share their learning with others if required. Noham Community Shop adopted a 'seeing and doing' model to share their expertise:

'We host visits at the shop from other shops. We've got one coming up, actually, next week... who haven't actually opened a shop yet, but they're hoping to open a community shop, and we're hosting a visit and usually spend three or four hours, this will be the third one that we've done, ..We try and get together a cross-section of our group, perhaps four or five of us, a finance person, a

buyer, someone from marketing, so that we can cover all aspects of the business.’ (Noham Village Shop).

Similarly, other Tenants and Residents Associations considering estate management options now visited HWTRA. Skills sharing appeared more common (if less formalised) in the groups with a more fluid membership. Members of CACA used the skills gained to establish refugee and support groups in places they had moved to elsewhere in the UK. Members of CFAG were using the fundraising skills they had gained to support international projects and to form a village action group that tackled issues beyond the need for a flood barrier. Cobham Connects noted:

‘We’re at quite an exciting point because we’re literally taking what we’ve learnt now and thinking about what value it has for other people.’ (Cobham Connects)

Gains for people, groups, and communities

Those interviewed talked about what had been gained from their own, and wider community, perspectives. Activism had involved developing or refining particular personal skills:

‘How to work with people, (elected) members, officers who are coming with a political agenda. So political skills, how to work your way round systems and understand bureaucratic systems... More generally I think some people learned some highly technical skills like designing questionnaires and doing research.’ (CFAG)

A HWTRA committee member also remarked on what he had gained from his involvement in the group:

‘I personally can take an awful lot away from what I’ve been doing in the voluntary capacity, it’s added a hell of a lot to my CV, and you couldn’t pay for it in all honesty, so as much as I sometimes moan that I’m £3,500 down [in expenses], I couldn’t have bought that, so...’ (HWTRA)

CACA, members were highly educated and in professional employment in their countries of origin. However, this education and employment history was not recognised in the UK and they knew little about UK systems and institutional culture (Phillimore and Goodson 2010). Involvement in the group offered the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the way things worked in the UK and to develop skills and experience that helped them get a job or a better job:

‘She started working in a restaurant. But with us she was doing advice and went and got her NVQ in Advice Guidance and Counselling and now she is an advisor with the Council.’ (CACA).

Further, interviewees highlighted broader social and economic benefits for the wider community associated with the development of their community organisation:

‘It’s all linked to the shop, but it brings in other people as well, like, for instance, local trades-people who’ve done work for us in the building, particularly when we were developing the coffee shop area, what value it’s been to them, not just directly with what we’ve paid them, but with other work they’ve picked up because other people have seen them working in the shop and asked them to do jobs for them.’ (Noham Village Shop)

CFAG and Noham Community Shop felt that their actions had contributed to building new networks and relationships within the locality bringing together people across class or other divides. Participating in community activities was also said to be a good way of helping newcomers to fit into the local community and to develop social networks of their own. CACA believed that their experience running the group had enabled them to develop networks and projects across African communities in the UK. This was a move from their early work that focussed more around a single country of origin or region of residence.

Informality and friendliness were key characteristics of the way groups operated, even when fully constituted and involved in highly structured/managerial activities such as running an estate, or village hall. For Noham Village Shop, establishing a community owned business was not only about “providing somewhere for convenient shopping” but also creating “a social meeting place”.

‘I really enjoy coming up here. And the other big thing is...you make so many friends. I mean, you can come in here any day and you’re going to meet people that you know and you’re happy to see.’
(Heritage Hall)

As more formal structures emerged, for each group these needed to be flexible and facilitate participation, rather than being rigid and alien to a particular community’s way of working.

Passion – plus knowledge: how things work

Our original intention was to map, both literally and visually, relationships within and between groups, and identify the level of importance of particular skills, leadership and knowledge that an individual might bring to below the radar group development. What emerged was something different; a combination of skills and knowledge of collectives:

‘Everyone was equally important – whether they got names on petitions, helped with the research, organised fund raising events or did things like provide lighting at those events or get bands to perform at the ‘Bund Aid’ event. I would say it was not about any one person or any one set of skills being more important than others.’ (Canute Flood Action Group)

Technical knowledge was important, but, as noted, community connections were most important. Furthermore knowledge without passion and a shared cause was seen as ‘meaningless’. The collective abilities and capacities of all involved brought groups their strength and were critical to their success. Each member of the group could be conceived as being part of a jigsaw. If any part was missing the group might not function effectively so the missing piece had to be sourced via social networks.

A key assumption in trying to map changing skills, knowledge and resources over time, was that community groups experience critical events in their lifetime. As external researchers, it was possible to identify such events for the groups involved: the Community Shop losing its premises just before its planned opening: a founder member and driver of the campaign group dying. This thinking did not, however, match the narrative of participants. For them, the life of the group was seen as a journey, rather than as a series of critical events. The story told highlighted natural progression.

Our findings demonstrate that community groups use a wide range of resources, social networks and skills to reach their goals. Many of those resources could be described as human capital

developed from other spheres or their lives: paid work, raising children, and running other voluntary groups. Emotional capital was also critical (see chapter 12); personality traits and emotions that motivated group members to work for the good of their community.

Wide connections meant access to support, in the form of volunteer time and to the specialist skills needed to run organisations effectively. As resource needs changed over time groups moved from what, in Putnam's (2000) terms, might be describe as bonding capital, that which exists between members of the bounded community of geography or interest, to bridging capital as they sought and exchanged knowledge from and with other organisations by observing how they worked. Some, but by no means all, also developed linking capital with agencies or institutions, though typically such connections were developed via individual's personal or professional social networks, rather than through any formal networking on the part of the organisation.

Learning to support community learning; final reflections

Much of the investment in learning for community action has, and continues to be, focused on formal training (IVAR, 2010) and the language of training needs analysis (NCVO, undated). This approach assumes that there are a set of specialist technical skills which need to be in place for community organisations to flourish. Yet as Cairns (2003: 121) notes: 'While community activists clearly do a great deal of learning it does not necessarily come from [the] formal training' (Cairns, 2003: 121).

Our participants did not talk about training as instrumental to their learning. Indeed, often training was seen as 'patronising', 'not useful' and did not recognise the tension between communities as a space for learning at people's own pace and on their own issues, and more top down, formalised, learning on what policy makers and others assume is needed to strengthen community organisations and activities (Johnston and Coare, 2003).

People learned by seeing and doing and connecting. Through social networks and 'horizontal' peer experiences:

'What I'm trying to encourage people to see is that a different perspective. Just 'cause Joe Bloggs says it and he's given you a lecture, it doesn't mean to say that Joe's right.' (HWTRA).

Learning in below the radar community groups developed collectively and by targeting and recruiting individuals into the group, rather than being an isolated and individualised activity. Further, our analysis suggests that there is not a hierarchy of learning. The 'soft' skills of being well connected, being able to negotiate and bring emotion and passion to a cause are as important as technical knowledge and vital ingredients in the success of below the radar community activity. As Cairns (2003: 121) noted: 'While community activists clearly do a great deal of learning it does not necessarily come from [the] formal training' (2003: 121).

Final Reflections; spaces for learning

Networks and networking were clearly important for the learning of research participants. However, as successful groups, other forms of capital came into play: human, financial, cultural and environmental (Bourdieu, 1986; Savage et al., 2005). Each respondent described the complex weave of skills and knowledge (from communications through to understanding health and safety

legislation) required to run even a small, semi-formal, community group. Social networks by themselves were insufficient.

Research in formal voluntary organisations has tended to stress the importance of formalised, often accredited learning (Lasa, 2012) with much less known about informal, experiential, learning in community groups (Wenger, 1998). Yet informal learning is acknowledged to come from a whole range of activities related to work, family or leisure. It is often not structured and incidental (Commission of the European Communities, 2000). Academics writing in this field stress the communal, rather than individualised, characteristics of informal, community based learning and that informal learning is 'situated' in local issues, activities and cultures (Colley et al., 2002: 5).

Learning through experience in community activity may have very practical outcomes for those involved, including access to employment. Those outcomes are not the motivation for, or purpose of, learning in community groups. Rather participants talked of the 'practical intelligence' (Oddington Hall) required to run their organisation. Learning was by 'seeing and doing' rather than training per se. Such embedded 'practical intelligence' has tended to be under-valued in a culture where formal learning and accreditation is rewarded. What it requires is spaces (both in terms of time and venues) for those active in their community to come together to share ideas and knowledge. It is those very spaces (see chapters 5 and 6) that, in austere times, are under threat.

Reflective Exercises

- Reflecting on your own experience, how did you 'learn' to be active in your own community.
- Consider the 'value' of embedded 'practical intelligence' and informal learning for social action and building community groups.
- Policy debate has been dominated by ideas of social capital and social networks. What other forms of capital (human, cultural, financial) might community groups need and how are those capitals 'built'.

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